

# Report to Military Families

Information for South Dakota Military Families

Summer 2004



## Military Families – The Backbone of America's Defense

Dear Friend:

At the end of June, just days before the transfer of sovereignty to Iraq's transitional government, I had the opportunity to visit Iraq and Kuwait. There I met with a number of soldiers from South Dakota, including the entire 740th Transportation Company. Words cannot express how proud I was to witness the dedication and service of these troops, operating in very tough circumstances.

The men and women serving in Iraq and Afghanistan are making tremendous sacrifices, and so are their families. I've met with many soldiers who have gone for months without seeing their young children, who have experienced serious financial losses as a result of their absence, or who have not been told when they will be allowed to return home. And yet, all of these men and women remain absolutely dedicated to the success of their mission, no matter how long it takes. They are true patriots, and I am deeply grateful for their service.

I believe our nation has an obligation to support these troops and their families. Along with my colleagues in the Senate, I've been working to provide this support, and we have made progress in a number of areas this year.

The Senate adopted several of my initiatives to provide affordable health care for reservists and their families; loan relief to small farmers who are called to active duty; and research funding to prevent leishmaniasis, a disease many soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan have contracted from the bite of infected sand fleas.

I also won swift approval of compensation for 30,000 service members – including 300 from South Dakota – who were left out of a program that pays for flights home by troops on leave from Iraq.

I also feel we should never send our troops into harm's way without the training and tools they need to complete their mission. That's why, last October, I supported extra funding for body armor and other equipment needs. Unfortunately, we were defeated, because the Pentagon assured Congress that there was no body armor problem. A few months later, several South Dakota soldiers told me that many troops in Iraq still lacked armor. At that point, I contacted Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to demand that protective armor be provided to all troops. By the end of February, we learned that all South Dakota soldiers had received armor and, a few months later, the Army announced that all troops now have the appropriate armor.

As I left Iraq, a National Guardsman from Scotland, SD, who had been detailed to provide security during my visit, passed me a note that said, "I am very proud to fight and to serve my country, like so many of my relatives before me." I am so proud of the dedication and honor with which of all the South Dakotans I met in Iraq are serving. Their commitment is strong, and our country's commitment to them must be equally strong.



*Senator Daschle traveled in June to Iraq and Kuwait, where he met with members of the South Dakota National Guard's 740th Transportation Company.*

**Call Tom!**

**Toll-Free:**

1-800-424-9094

**In Aberdeen:**

(605) 225-8823

**In Rapid City:**

(605) 348-7551

**In Sioux Falls:**

(605) 334-9596

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# Returning from Deployment?

## Know your benefits.

**M**embers of the National Guard and Reserve are eligible for a number of benefits that may help to ease the transition from active duty deployment to civilian life. Though all reservists are eligible for some benefits, those who serve in combat zones for more than 180 days are eligible for certain special benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). It is important to note that these special VA benefits are available even to those who remain in the Reserves.

**Health Care for Combat Veterans.** Reservists returning from deployment in combat zones have two years of VA eligibility for treatment of illness and injuries, except those clearly unrelated to military service. This benefit is available to reservists who remain members of the reserve component after their deployment ends; reservists who retire or detach become eligible for veterans' health care benefits after 180 days of active duty service. More information on health care options can be found at <http://www.deploymenthealth.mil/reservist/personnel.asp>



*Senator Daschle is committed to protecting the jobs and benefits of reservists returning from overseas deployment. He recently visited United Defense in Aberdeen, where he held a roundtable discussion on employment security for reservists.*

**Employment Rights.** Under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act, members of the National Guard and Reserve who are mobilized for active duty service are entitled to return to their civilian employment upon demobilization. They are also entitled to the rights and benefits that would have been attained through continuous employment. Questions and problems should be directed to the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve, at <http://www.esgr.org>, or to the Veterans Employment and Training Service at (605) 626-2325.

**Educational Opportunities.** Some reservists are eligible for benefits under the Montgomery G.I. Bill. Those reservists who have made a six-year commitment to serve in the Reserve or National Guard, have completed training, have earned a high school diploma or general equivalency certificate, and remain in good standing are eligible for 36 months of tuition assistance.

**Home Loan Guaranty.** Reservists who serve more than 180 days on active duty become eligible for VA loan guarantees for purchase or improvement of a home or condominium. Reservists who have completed six years of honorable service are also eligible for this benefit.

**Below is a list of resources that may be helpful to you.** In addition, please feel free to call my office for assistance.

**Ellsworth Air Force Base Family Service Center.** Provides services to family members of Ellsworth Air Force Base personnel. (605)385-4663.

**South Dakota American Legion.** Provides some temporary assistance to military families with children. (605)886-3604; <http://www.legion.org/attack/docs/family.htm>

**South Dakota Counseling Association.** Provides resources and counseling to military personnel and their families. (605)232-6285; <http://www.sdcounseling.org/militaryinfo.html>

**County Veterans Service Officers.** County officers provide information about and assistance in obtaining benefits. A list of county officers is available at <http://www.state.sd.us/military/VetAffairs/county.htm> or by calling (605) 773-4981.

# Ensuring Quality Health Care for Reservists

**T**he National Guard and Reserve are critical components of our nation's defense – now more than ever. Offering affordable health care to reservists and their families is a key part of my strategy for keeping this force strong.

Since September 11, 2001, the National Guard and Reserve have played an increasingly important role in defending our nation. Reservists have been called upon to patrol our skies, borders, ports, and waterways. Overseas, 150,000 Guard and Reserve personnel have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan.

These troops are vital to our security in the 21st Century, but their pay and benefits package was designed for the Cold War – when calling up the Reserves was rare.

Right now, more than 20 percent of the Guard and Reserve – including 40 percent of junior enlisted personnel – lack health coverage. That's unconscionable. It's not fair to our reservists, and it weakens a force that defends us all.

The latest statistics for recruiting and retention indicate troop shortages are coming up soon. An affordable health care plan will allow us to continue to recruit and retain the world's best citizen-soldiers, and it will provide these citizen-soldiers with the health care they need and deserve. The need could not be more urgent.

Last year I introduced a bill – S. 852 – and several amendments designed to deliver health care to reservists. We won a partial victory: 180 days of post-deployment TRICARE coverage (up from 60 days under previous law), better benefits counseling for families, free medical and dental checks when reservists are alerted for mobilization, and a one-year TRICARE program for unemployed reservists.

This year, we are fighting to help all reservists gain permanent access to TRICARE.



*Senator Daschle has worked on behalf of National Guard and Reserve members throughout his career in Congress. He has led the fight to make TRICARE available to all Guard and Reserve members and their families.*

I am pleased to report that a strong, bipartisan majority voted in the Senate this summer to adopt the plan put forward by Senator Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) and me. Our program is now under consideration by negotiators from the Senate and House of Representatives who are developing a final defense authorization bill for 2005. I am hopeful they will take swift action to provide reservists with this support.

On the front lines in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other places around the world, there is no difference between active duty and mobilized reserve personnel. Both risk their lives and make tremendous sacrifices, including long separations from friends and family, in order to ensure our nation's security. I believe we should stop treating citizen-soldiers as second-class citizens, and begin to provide them with every resource and support they need to fulfill their role in today's military.

# Welcome Home!



I know that all South Dakotans join me in celebrating the return of the Guard and Reserve units that have successfully completed their service overseas. This year, South Dakota has already welcomed home members of the 200th Engineering Company, the 727th Transportation Company, Company B of the 109th Medical Brigade, the 1742nd Transportation Company, the 842nd Engineering Company, the 740th Transportation Company, and the STARC Medical Command. Communities across the state have welcomed home these troops with parades, homecoming ceremonies, and yellow ribbons. We thank these soldiers for serving with distinction, dedication, and courage.

## A Bright Future at Ellsworth Air Force Base

The summer before the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the Defense Department made the decision to retire one third of the B-1B bomber fleet. But the B-1B proved its value during air assaults in both Afghanistan and Iraq, striking with a precision never before achieved by any plane, in any war.

The combat performance of the B-1B is good news for Ellsworth Air Force Base, home to half the nation's fleet.

In recent years, I have worked to educate key decision makers in Congress about the importance of the B-1B and to improve its combat capabilities.

Last year, I was successful in preventing the final B-1Bs from being retired and convincing the Air Force to reconsider its fleet size. As a result, the Air Force chose to increase the fleet from 60 planes to 67 planes.

I have also worked to ensure B-1B flight crews will have the capabilities they need in the decades to come. This year, Congress approved a defense appropriations bill that includes \$22.5 million, added at my request, for B-1B modernization. The funding will add two features to the B-1 fleet that were recommended by flight crews serving in Iraq and Afghanistan: a digital communications system and an improved radar for tracking ground targets.

It is also important that we keep Ellsworth as a premier facility for housing the B-1B. Toward this end, I worked to procure funding for several base improvement initiatives, including a new \$11.8 million Base Operations Center, 75 new base housing units, and a new flight simulator center for training B-1B crews. Moreover, I introduced an amendment, adopted by the Senate, to create national centers of excellence for unmanned vehicle technology, and am working to establish one such center at Ellsworth. I believe that these initiatives will keep the B-1B – and Ellsworth – flying high.

*I need your input. Please contact me with your thoughts on veterans and military issues.*

## Contact Tom Daschle

*USPS mail should be addressed to the Washington, D.C. office.*

### ABERDEEN

320 South First Street, Suite 101  
Aberdeen, SD 57401  
(605)225-8823

### RAPID CITY

1313 West Main Street  
Rapid City, SD 57709  
(605)348-7551

### SIOUX FALLS

320 North Main Avenue, Suite B  
Sioux Falls, SD 57101  
(605)334-9596

### WASHINGTON, D.C.

United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510  
Toll-free: 1-800-424-9094  
(202) 224-2321  
Fax: (202) 224-6603

Email: see website form at  
<http://daschle.senate.gov>